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## **Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development**

### **Special Issue: Normative Approaches to Language Policy and Planning**

#### **Normative Political Theory's Contribution to Language Policy Research**

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Across the world, linguistic diversity leads to heated political and intellectual debates over what represents a principled and fair approach to language policy. Such debates are only likely to increase in salience as political communities are forced to grapple with challenges that include the rise of English as a global lingua franca, the increasing prevalence of international migration, and also, demands for recognition from ethno-national groups. Given this context, it is significant that over the course of the last decade a new body of literature has gradually emerged within the general field of language policy and planning—a literature in which normative political theorists engage with language rights, linguistic equality and linguistic justice.

This special issue aims to contribute to the further development of this normative literature. It does so by critically examining several of the competing normative frameworks that have been brought to bear on language policy and planning, and also, by formulating new alternative frameworks. This is a timely initiative. Over the past decade, normative research on language policy and planning has developed substantially. We can no longer affirm, as Kymlicka and Patten (2003: 1) could at the turn of the century, that linguistic diversity has received 'relatively little attention from political theorists.' Since the publication of their edited collection, *Language Rights and Political Theory* (2003), we have witnessed the publication of an increasing amount of normative work that seeks to outline the principles

on which a just approach to language policy should be based (see De Schutter, 2008; De Schutter and Ypi, 2011; Lewis 2011, 2013; Patten, 2001, 2003, 2014; Stilz, 2009; Van Parijs, 2011; see also the various contributions in Kymlicka and Patten, 2003; Ricento, Peled and Ives, 2014; and De Schutter and Robichaud, 2015). During the same period, sociologists and sociolinguists have also reflected in a more systematic manner on the ethical dimension of language policies and planning (see Haque, 2012; May, 2011; Wee, 2010).

The aim of this short introduction is to set the context for the papers that follow. It will do so in three steps. It will first explain why the move by normative political theorists to engage with language policy and planning should be viewed as a welcome development that can add in important ways to long-standing scholarly debates regarding the relationship between language, society and the state. Second, it will outline the development of this new literature, and also identify some of its main features to date. And finally, it will briefly overview the papers that make-up the special issue, with an emphasis on the themes that are raised and the original positions that are advanced.

### **Normative Political Theory's Contribution to Language Policy Research**

At the risk of over-simplifying, normative political theory can be understood as a particular branch of political theory that concerns itself with the ethics of social and political life. Normative political theorists are thus interested in research questions that enquire about the features of the 'good society' - in other words, questions that focus on the 'ought' rather than the 'is' of social and political life. Moreover, they tend to engage with such questions by reflecting on the ethical dimension of issues relevant to the organization and direction of society (for example the distribution of rights and resources), and by critically evaluating different understandings of key ethical concepts such as justice, equality, freedom and

democracy.

Given this background, the language-related questions that political theorists have addressed over recent years have included the following: Should our interest in being able to use our own language give rise to rights, and if so what are the nature and status of these rights? Who should be able to claim linguistic provisions as a matter of right? For example, should we distinguish between the linguistic claims of national and immigrant minorities? Should a language policy seek to achieve particular linguistic outcomes – such as the establishment of a common public language or the maintenance of minority languages? Or should it rather seek to establish fair procedural conditions?

The continued close engagement with such questions on the part of normative political theory can further knowledge in the general field of language policy and planning in two important ways. First, at a general level, it reinforces the move, seen since the early 1990s, towards a more socially and politically informed understanding of language policy. A key weakness of early work in this field was a tendency to view the selection and implementation of a particular language policy as 'non-political, non-ideological, pragmatic, even technicist exercise' (May, 2015: 46; see also Ricento, 2000). However, as many have since argued, this is a highly misguided perspective. Language policies are never developed within historical, social or political vacuums. Rather, they always reflect particular historical understandings as well as particular social and political values and priorities (Tollefson, 1991; Williams, 1992; May, 2011). Part of the significance of the recent normative work on language policy and planning - given the type of research questions pursued - is that it can underline this general point in an explicit manner.

Second, and more important, normative scholarship can further language policy research by providing more robust justifications for the various values and assumptions that underlie political decisions. As part of the move towards a more socially and politically informed understanding of language policy, scholars from some of the field's more traditional disciplines (sociolinguistics, sociology, anthropology) have produced work on themes such as linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1994), language genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), language shift and revitalization (Fishman, 1991), language endangerment (Tsunoda, 2006), language death (Crystal, 2000) and linguistic ecology (Nettle and Romaine, 2000). Such contributions are often beset with normative claims that draw on key political principles, including justice, freedom, fairness, equality, rights and democracy. Yet, on the whole, there is insufficient appreciation that these principles give rise to a range of different interpretations and theories – i.e. different theories of justice, equality, etc. –, and that we need to understand these nuances before we can make confident claims regarding how such principles should guide policy. This is what political theorists can bring to the field of language policy and planning - a detailed understanding of key political principles, which, in turn, can provide more rigor to the normative claims that those engaged in language policy research wish to advance or defend (see also De Schutter, 2007; Peled, 2015).

### **Normative Language Policy: The Story so Far...**

It has been argued that a mixture of practical and theoretical factors prompted political theorists to reflect on the ethical dimension of linguistic diversity (Kymlicka and Patten, 2003: 2). At the practical level, by the late 1990s, a number of challenges where linguistic considerations loomed large, were occupying prominent positions on the political agenda of many Western democracies - immigration, sub-state nationalism and the implications of

cultural globalization. At the theoretical level, debates internal to political theory also raised the profile of language policy and planning. Without doubt, the most important internal debate was focused on ethno-cultural and ethno-national diversity, which occupied the attention of a substantial number of political theorists during the late 1980s and then throughout the 1990s. These debates have often been encompassed by general headings such as 'multiculturalism and minority rights', 'the politics of recognition' or 'the politics of identity' (for influential contributions, see Kymlicka, 1989, 1995; Taylor, 1992; Carens, 2000; Parekh, 2000; Tully, 1995; Miller, 1995).

Given that the normative interest in language and linguistic diversity emerged out of earlier debates regarding ethno-cultural and ethno-national diversity, we can see an overlap between several of the normative positions and principles advanced as part of both debates. However, the debate on language policy and planning features one significant break from the earlier debate on ethno-cultural and ethno-national diversity (De Schutter and Robichaud, 2015: 89). One of the normative positions that featured prominently in earlier debates held that the state should adhere to a policy of 'disestablishment' or 'privatization'. From this perspective, the state should stand back from the spheres of ethnicity, culture and identity, and refrain from recognizing or supporting any particular tradition or way of life (see Kukathas 1992; Barry 2001).

Yet, while this approach may have some merit with regard to certain issues (e.g. religion), it simply is not a viable option when it comes to language. The state cannot detach itself completely from the linguistic sphere. Indeed, 'language is its Achilles' heel' (Kymlicka and Grin, 2003: 9). For any modern state to operate effectively, decisions must be made regarding which language(s) should be used by the courts, the bureaucracy, the army,

public schools, public media, road signs, town names, etc. (Kymlicka, 1995: 111; Carens, 2000: 77-8; Patten, 2001: 693). Indeed, even if it has been decided not to declare any particular language ‘official’, as is the case in the United States and the United Kingdom, decisions still need to be made about the de facto language(s) of public administration (Patten, 2001: 693). As a result, in contrast to earlier episodes in political theory's engagement with issues of identity and culture, the normative debate regarding linguistic diversity has not featured any serious questioning of whether the state should actually intervene. When it comes to language, we must accept ‘the fact of linguistic establishment’ (Bauböck, 2001: 328). Given this, the key normative question is not whether or not the state should intervene, but rather what form should that intervention take.

In the current normative literature on linguistic diversity, two broad models of policy intervention have been advocated. On the one hand, there are those that argue that the appropriate state response to linguistic diversity should be the promotion of a *multilingual public sphere* where different language communities are accorded a broadly equal level of recognition and support. Proponents of public multilingualism disagree on how this principle should be realized. Some advocate the adoption of a *territorial* model of multilingualism, in which the political community is divided into a series of units, and a particular language is established as the sole official language for each of these units (Van Parijs, 2011; Bauböck, 2015). Others advocate the adoption of a *personal* model of multilingualism whereby each language is recognized as official right across the political community (De Schutter, 2008; May 2003, 2012; Patten, 2003, 2014; Réaume, 1991).

On the other hand, while there is support for multilingualism among a number of political theorists that have contributed to the literature, it is by no means an option favored

by all. For certain theorists, pursuing multilingualism is misguided and the appropriate state response to linguistic diversity should be the promotion of a *monolingual public sphere*. This would entail declaring one language as official across the state, and that language would be the sole medium used to access public services and to conduct public business (Barry, 2001; Pogge, 2003).

Debates over which policy model should be favored tend to draw on different understandings of our relationship with language (De Schutter, 2007: 8); more specifically, whether that relationship is primarily 'constitutive' or 'instrumental'. Those that stress the constitutive aspect take the view that language is an important part of who we are - that it is an important marker of our identity. Based on this connection, states should pursue policies that uphold the self-respect and dignity of the members of different language communities by providing them with fair opportunities to use their favored tongues and to strive for their maintenance over time (De Schutter, 2008; May 2003, 2012; Réaume, 1991, 2003). In contrast, those that insist on the instrumental aspect will take the view that languages, given their communicative function, should be primarily viewed as tools that facilitate the pursuit of certain non-linguistic objectives, for example social mobility (Barry, 2001; Pogge, 2003) or democratic deliberation (Weinstock, 2003). As a result, states should adopt the language policy model that is most likely to realize these key social and political objectives. It should be noted that very few of those who can be placed in the instrumentalist camp reject completely arguments that highlight people's constitutive attachment to different languages. These scholars are usually willing to acknowledge the language-identity link. Yet, on balance, they feel that when it comes to evaluating different policy options, it is the instrumental function of language that should be prioritized.



Regardless of where political theorists situate themselves on the constitutive-instrumental divide, there seems to be a general consensus that an account of the normative significance of language should be based on an assessment of its potential value and contribution, either to individuals or societies. For languages to be deemed morally significant it must be demonstrated that they promote particular interests, either in the form of individual identity and dignity, or in the form of more general social interests such as administrative efficiency and democratic stability. Therefore, political theorists have thus far tended to reject approaches that stress the *intrinsic* value of languages, and that claim that languages should be viewed as morally valuable in their own right (for an exception see Musschenga 1998). This is a view that is not uncommon among sociolinguists, and in particular those that have contributed to the literature on language ecology and endangerment (e.g. Crystal, 2000; Nettle and Romaine, 2000). For many political theorists, it is a morally problematic position as it creates a situation where languages are treated as entities that can place problematic moral duties on their speakers, and indeed other individuals and communities (Kymlicka 1995; Boran, 2003; Weinstock, 2003)

### **This collection**

Each article that comprises this special issue examines and engages with a number the themes outlined above. Taken together, the special issue aims to push forward the normative literature on language policy and planning. Specifically, contributions include a comprehensive treatment of language policy and planning from the perspective of political liberalism, two new normative approaches to language policy and planning, a non-identity based defense of policies of multilingualism, and a contribution focused on the limits of linguistic justice and the need to move towards the more promising notion of ‘language ethics’.

Matteo Bonotti sheds important light on the role and status of language within John Rawls' influential work on political liberalism. Rawls' scholarship has fueled many debates and controversies within normative political theory, but very little has been said about how linguistic diversity may bear on the realization of justice. Bonotti investigates this issue with exemplary clarity and precision. The article proceeds in three parts, each exploring the logical conclusions of a Rawlsian principle or value from the perspective of language and linguistic diversity. These include the principle of equal basic rights and liberties, the value of self-respect and the principle of fair equality of opportunity. Bonotti contends that the first two cannot justify policies of multilingualism, but that the third opens the door for such policies. For him, the principle of fair equality of opportunity engages political liberalism into democratic deliberation in order to ascertain people's linguistic identities as well as their preferences with regard to language policies. These deliberations may result in demands for policies of multilingualism, which the state would have to fulfill in order to ensure fair equality of opportunity for its citizens.

Both Huw Lewis and Andrew Shorten draw on the capability approach within normative political theory to push forward the debate on linguistic justice. These are exciting contributions because they are the first to bring to bear the capability approach on language policy and planning. Lewis critically engages with a prominent position within normative work on language and linguistic diversity: the establishment of fair background conditions. This position holds that the state ought to remove unfair pressures that may prevent or even discourage citizens from using their preferred language. From this perspective, citizens ought to have fair opportunities to use, transfer and sustain their language. In the scholarship, these typically include rights, liberties and services. Lewis terms this the 'resource-based approach' to fair background conditions. For him, this approach, while important, cannot provide

citizens with effective linguistic opportunities; background conditions are about resources but also capabilities. As a result, Lewis formulates a ‘capability-based approach’ to fair linguistic conditions, which examines how personal, social and environmental factors may prevent people from effectively converting their resources into opportunities.

Each theory of linguistic justice aims to avoid and eliminate linguistic disadvantage. More broadly, the normative scholarship on language policy and planning is geared towards devising approaches and frameworks that promote fairness and equality regardless of linguistic preferences. Shorten’s contribution is important because it asks how to define linguistic disadvantage. Specifically, the article explores four distinct accounts of linguistic disadvantage: inadequate communicative opportunities, unsatisfied preferences, diminished access to resources and capability deprivation. After discussing in some detail these four distinct conceptions, Shorten argues that one based on the capability approach provides a better basis for comparing linguistic situations and evaluating the normative significance of linguistic inequalities.

David Robichaud seeks to make room for a third way between equality-based and laissez-faire approaches to linguistic justice. Of course, these two camps within the normative literature have relied on competing principles and values to formulate their respective justifications of equal treatment and benign neglect. For Robichaud, however, egalitarians, while having made the correct diagnosis, are unable to respond to important laissez-fairist objections. In trying to overcome the impasse between these two dominant camps, the article lays the groundwork for an alternative ‘efficiency’ approach to linguistic justice. This third way relies on the notion of market failures – both insufficient information and externalities – to justify state interventions in relation to language policy and planning. The efficiency

approach can justify a range of measures or constraints, including medium of instruction, language in the workplace and other social domains.

The starting premise for Aviad Rubin's contribution is a significant gap between normative work on language and linguistic diversity and language policies that endure around the world. Put simply, many normative theorists justify and defend policies of multilingualism, whereas nation-states remain reluctant to grant recognition and institutional accommodations to minority languages. The article explores this puzzle in two main parts. On the one hand, it explains the gap between research and policy. Rubin contends that the problem largely stems from the emphasis on identity and identity politics in the scholarship. For him, these identity-based normative justifications have little leverage in the political arena. On the other hand, the article develops three non-identity justifications of policies of multilingualism. These build on the instrumental dimension of language, issues related to democratic performance and finally liberal values of equality and access.

Yael Peled's invigorating article concludes our special issue. It makes a compelling case for a broader and more inclusive normative scholarship on language and linguistic diversity. For Peled, the heavy emphasis on liberalism and liberal justice has prevented the emergence of a "language ethics," which would include approaches founded on competing political traditions as well as moral inquiries concerned with notions of friendship, care or empathy. She submits that work on linguistic justice has been a welcome addition to scholarship on language policy and planning, but that political philosophers have much more to contribute to debates in that field. In specific terms, the article is divided into three main parts: a discussion of the primacy of justice in mainstream normative political philosophy, an engaging critique of Van Parijs's theory of linguistic justice and finally an exploration of an alternative

approach premised on the notion of the dialogical self.

In summary, our contributors, as highlighted in this final section, explore trends and patterns in the normative literature on language policy and planning in order to advance novel arguments and formulate new frameworks. Taken together, we believe this special issue deepens our understanding of language and linguistic diversity and opens new and exciting paths for future research.

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